

Recreation: Crescent Creek Wild and Scenic River

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Existing Condition:

Recreational opportunities for the designated portion of Crescent Creek are limited due to the unpredictable flows and limited access for recreational opportunities. The designation begins at the mouth of the Crescent Lake dam in a small steep canyon that is inaccessible to general recreationalists. The creek then flows near Crescent Lake townsite, under the railroad, and into private land. No use is observed by the remaining residences of the townsite. Limited public recreation occurs for the first four to six miles of the designated river.

The second half of the designated stream, once it leaves private land, wraps around Odell Butte south of Forest Road 61. The steep canyon and limited Forest Service roads restrict access along most of the river. This area does see limited use by fisherman during the summer that either park on Forest Road 61 and hike down the canyon or drive down one of the low-standard roads to the river. Towards the end of the designation is Crescent Creek campground, a small, somewhat isolated campground that is popular for fishing, bird watching, and camping during hunting season. The campground is operated by a concessionaire from the end of May to the end of September with additional use in the fall for hunting camps. It contains a vault toilet, picnic tables, and fire rings. The campground has river access and views of the unique geology and vegetation in the canyon.

Presently, there are no Forest Service trails along the river but limited use by off-trail hikers, hunters, and mushroom pickers can be seen in the area. Due to the limited developed roads and steep terrain, this area on Forest Service land sees very little winter recreation. On the private land, there are a few unauthorized trails that begin on private property but lead to Forest Service land. Floating or canoeing/kayaking down the creek is not feasible for any sustained period. Downed trees, low flows, and narrow canyons prevent navigation of the water.

The majority of the developed recreation use occurring is on private property and is predominately associated with summer cabins and residences along the river. Although the management plan will not impact activities on private property, this recreation NEPA analysis considers the recreational experience along the entire stretch of the designated creek including both private and Forest Service land. Private landowners in the housing subdivisions commonly have streamside patios, platforms, fences and signs. These properties present a developed recreational character while still maintaining some natural scenic river attributes. Over the years property owners have made additions including small docks, bridges, and multiple types of bank stabilization efforts. These projects range in size, river aesthetics, and impacts to the physical environment. Several developments include materials and features that are not consistent with a natural scenic river.

Only small portions of the designated and proposed WSR boundary include the Scenic View management area under the Deschutes LRMP. With limited visibility of the creek from major roadways, very few members of the public drive in the area to view Crescent Creek. Forest Road 61, also known as the Crescent Cutoff, is an extremely popular highway that provides a short-cut between Highway 58 and the Highway 97. It also provides access to the Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway known as Forest Road 46 that is the gateway to several popular locations on the of Deschutes National Forest.

Desired Future Condition:

Like many areas on the Crescent Ranger District, Crescent Creek provides a primitive or semi-primitive experience for recreationalists on National Forest lands. With limited development along the river, visitors are able to explore for themselves and have few to no encounters with other people. Developed recreation opportunities are available elsewhere across the Crescent Ranger District and Deschutes National Forest. Maintaining this level of undeveloped character along Crescent Creek provides a unique experience for forest visitors that the District aims to preserve. To preserve the existing character, the desired future condition includes the following:

Low Impact Recreation

Low impact recreational practices protect Outstandingly Remarkable Values. Low impact dispersed camping avoids tree damage or vegetation loss, and low impact trail users protect trails from excessive erosion. Low impact recreation protects recreational experiences and environmental quality by respecting others and using proper sanitation and litter disposal. Motorized travel is kept to designated routes. Unauthorized trails that appear to cross from private to Forest Service land would be decommissioned and the physical environment would be restored.

Group Camping

The area around Odell Butte and near Crescent Creek could be an ideal location for additional group camping opportunities. During hunting season, several large camps appear along the Creek. With the existing low use of Crescent Creek campground, that location could be suitable for a group camp site.

Dispersed Camping

People continue to enjoy dispersed camping and camps are clean, soil erosion and runoff to the creek is minimized, and proper sanitation practices are followed. Low impact “Leave No Trace” camping techniques are communicated and followed.

Roads

The road system provides access to some portions of Crescent Creek corridor for recreation opportunities, driving for pleasure, forest management, and effective fire-fighting capability. It is desired to maintain a low road density road system in order to reduce the risk of water quality degradation occurring from roads, and provide primitive and semi-primitive self discovery experiences. The roads that remain open for access in the corridor are maintained to provide managed public access and prevent resource damage.

Railroad

Crescent Creek flows underneath the Union Pacific Railroad at the location known as the “Crescent Wye”. The railroad has been utilizing this location for several years including an active train route, out-building and storage areas, and as a maintenance site location. Unfortunately, over the years, railroad trash and debris has been left in this area. It is desired to clean up the Crescent Wye in coordination with Union Pacific to meet Forest Plan standards and guides and to increase aquatic and terrestrial habitat.

Consistent Uses

- Dispersed camping is allowed. Campsites are rested or decommissioned as needed.

- Fishing, hunting, hiking and other recreational opportunities exist. Motorized access occurs on designated routes in accordance with Travel Management standards.
- Boating which does not require wood manipulation.
- Winter recreation such as cross country skiing or over the snow machine travel.
- Bridges which fit the areas character, protect Outstandingly Remarkable Values and are built to withstand winter floods, or can be seasonally removed.
- Special use permits for groups, individuals, or organizations on the Crescent Ranger District which protect the area's character.
- Low key signing, off site interpretation, and on-site interpretation that is consistent with the area's desired character.
- Unauthorized road closures or obliterations for resource protection or to reduce vandalism

Inconsistent Uses

- Unauthorized trails or roads that adversely impact riparian areas, cultural sites, wildlife refugia, or cause unstable areas or erosive soils
- Dispersed camping or campfires that adversely impact Outstandingly Remarkable Resource Values would not be consistent.
- Illegal or undesirable behaviors such as building unauthorized roads or trails, building unauthorized bridges, shooting trees, graffiti, leaving trash, cutting live or dead standing trees outside firewood cutting areas, or vandalism would not be consistent.
- Illegal or undesirable behaviors associated with the railroad corridor such as waste and trash dumping, unauthorized road building, or unauthorized vegetation clearing
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Standards and Guidelines

Visitor Capacity

Section 3(d)(1) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act directs agencies to address visitor capacities in a comprehensive river management plan. This is to ensure that use levels in the river area do not threaten river values or established desired conditions. Overall visitor use within Crescent Creek area is quite low and does not appear to be threatening river values. Commensurate with this there has not been a large degree of investment in data collection, monitoring, and analysis to support visitor capacity estimates. As a result the visitor capacity estimates included in this comprehensive river management plan recognize the likelihood that visitor capacity decisions may need to be reviewed and revised as more data becomes available. The monitoring plan associated with this CRMP outlines thresholds that if exceeded would determine if a re-examination of visitor capacities or other negative effects to the river values is needed.

Initial Visitor Capacity Estimates

To determine initial visitor capacity estimates, visitors were divided into four categories: Crescent Creek Campground primary season, Crescent Creek Campground hunting season (fall), dispersed camping, and dispersed recreation. Capacity estimates were based off of formulas used in other WSR projects including the Upper White Salmon and professional judgement.

- Crescent Creek Campground, primary season use
 - Formula= (number of sites) x (number of days in season) x (site occupancy rate) x (average campers per site)
 - Crescent Creek Campground sees very light use compared to other developed campgrounds on the District. Standard site occupancy rate is around (1/3 or 33.3%) in visitor analysis. In this case, we will be utilizing a 1/10 rate for 10%. With observation, we will utilize an average of 4 campers per site verses. Standard operating season is 4 months over the summer (May-September).
 - **480 campers** during one primary season= 10 sites x 120 days x 10% occupancy x 4 campers
- Crescent Creek Campground, hunting season (fall)
 - Although no amenities are provided after the campground is closed, the area is popular for hunting camps. Multiple hunting seasons exist on the Crescent Ranger District but the most popular camping times typically overlap with modern rifle hunts in the month of October. Hunting camper at the campground have been observed to be closer to the standard 4 people per site, camping in larger numbers than primary season use campers in the area. The standard 1/3 occupancy rate is also applicable in this case.
 - **400 campers** during hunting season=10 sites x 30 days x 33.3% occupancy x 4 campers
- Dispersed camping
 - There are three known dispersed campsites within the river corridor. It is likely that there are more, smaller and less developed sites along the river due to the open vegetation and river access that have not been discovered. Dispersed campers occupy the area throughout the spring, summer and fall in small occupancy rates. Through observation, there are usually 2 campers per site.
 - **120 dispersed campers**= 3 sites x 200 days x 10% occupancy x 2 campers
- Dispersed recreation
 - Dispersed recreation within the river corridor includes hiking, hunting, and fishing. There are so few observations of dispersed recreation, there is no appropriate formula to estimate number of individuals. There are no established popular dispersed sites but in areas of open forest, recreationalist can easily move across the landscape. The best observations include counting vehicles throughout the year parked along the 'Crescent Cut-off' where recreationalist park and hike downhill to the river. Local residents may be accessing the river but their use is not documented since it appears they obtain access from private land. The majority of dispersed use occurs within the summer months (approximately 120 days). Average group size is estimated at 1-2 people.

Carrying Capacity

The following is an evaluation of the estimated carrying capacity of the river corridor that would maintain core river values and protect the river ORVs. If during monitoring these capacity numbers are approximately met, managers will need to reevaluate the need for additional management actions. This evaluation takes into consideration current facilities, roads and trails. As use patterns or other management activities across the District change, these numbers may need to be reevaluated.

- Crescent Creek Campground, primary season use
 - If the campground was at full capacity for half of the open season, this would likely mean that for several weeks during peak camping season, the campground would be completely or nearly full. If this were the case, campers that could not get into the campground would potentially go to surrounding areas and put additional pressure on natural resources and impact river values. With no other near-by developed recreation facilities, there isn't infrastructure that could protect the corridor. Popular existing dispersed sites would also likely be full during the busy camping season. Campers may create or expand dispersed sites.
 - **2,400 campers** during one primary season= 10 sites x 120 days x 50% occupancy x 4 campers
- Crescent Creek Campground, hunting season
 - With increased occupancy during hunting season, there would be periods where all sites were full and campers would seek near-by opportunities. Popular existing dispersed sites could also be full, causing campers to create new or expand dispersed sites. Since hunters are limited to their hunting season and specific tag, it is unlikely that the District would see drastic short term changes in hunting use of the ranger district.
 - **600 campers** during hunting season=10 sites x 30 days x 50% occupancy x 4 campers
- Dispersed Camping
 - With increased occupancy, there would be periods that all existing sites would be full and campers would seek new or expand dispersed sites. Without infrastructure, natural resource damage could occur including excess human waste and garbage. Dispersed camping could be directly related to available developed campground occupancy. If all near-by developed campgrounds are at or near capacity, more campers could choose to dispersed camp.
 - **600 dispersed campers**= 3 sites x 200 days x 50% occupancy x 2 campers
- Dispersed recreation
 - A signifier that the carrying capacity has been met for dispersed recreation would be recreation created natural resource damage within the river corridor. This could include users creating new or widening existing parking areas to access the river, the creation of illegal user roads or trails, and trash or dumping associated with hunting, fishing, or hiking area.

Environmental Consequences

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, Crescent Creek would remain a congressionally designated Wild and Scenic River. The boundary would remain as featured in the CRMP, Figure 1 (page 4) and would include the 10 mile segment on Forest Service land and private property. The original standard buffer would remain as the interim boundary for management. Although there would be no management plan, the river would still be managed by the Forest Service as Wild and Scenic and meet all current standards and guidelines associated with that designation. The Section 7 Process under the Wild and Scenic River Management Act would still apply for any activities (on private or Forest Service land) within the ordinary high water mark.

Under the No Action scenario, recreation would largely remain unchanged. With the current minimal use, very little active management on Forest Service land is needed. Without a management plan, future recreation uses and developments would have limited direction and purpose. Furthermore, without the revised boundary, areas of the river corridor that are outside the standard buffer would not receive additional protections. Unauthorized uses of the river and resource damage in riparian areas would still be addressed and mitigated under existing Forest Service standards and guides. The average Forest Service visitor would not be impacted by No Action, however, recreationalists would not receive the long term benefits that a management plan would provide.

Proposed Action- Alternative B

Although the Management Plan does not propose any on the ground activities, it would provide protection to the river corridor for years to come. The current uses of camping, fishing, hunting, and other dispersed recreation would continue. As shown in the capacity analysis, the river corridor could see an increase in use across recreational areas without causing resource damage. The proposed action would ensure that as recreation and use patterns change over the years, the river and its outstanding remarkable values would be protected.

Many of the existing Forest Service standards and guides already provide adequate protection to rivers, riparian areas, and riparian species. For this reason, the additional management plan standards and guides proposed in this CRMP will have no measurable change to recreation resources. Recreation managers will continue to protect sensitive riparian areas and river resources while managing current use and considering additional recreation development. Although boating or rafting isn't a current documented use, no wood manipulation can occur to facilitate that activity.

Changing the river corridor to Partial Retention for Scenic Views will also ensure that Crescent Creek will be an enjoyable place to visit for years to come (note: currently portions of the management area are designated Partial Retention Scenic Views). Partial Retention is a visual quality objective meaning human activities must remain visually subordinate to the attributes of the naturally evolved landscape character. Recreationalists and visitors to the area will benefit from scenery management standards as evidence of human manipulation will be minimal. Overall, current recreationalists and visitors to Crescent Creek would benefit from the resource and visual protections that this CRMP provides.